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8-1-2002

# Perceptions of Subtle Gender Discrimination, Hostility, and Sexual Harassment among Senior Women Faculty at Western Washington University

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## Recommended Citation

Clark, Linda D. (Linda Darlene); Jull, Pamela; and McKinney, Gary (Gary Russell), "Perceptions of Subtle Gender Discrimination, Hostility, and Sexual Harassment among Senior Women Faculty at Western Washington University" (2002). *Office of Survey Research*. 507.

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PERCEPTIONS OF SUBTLE GENDER DISCRIMINATION,  
HOSTILITY, AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT AMONG  
SENIOR WOMEN FACULTY AT WESTERN WASHING-  
TON UNIVERSITY

(REPORT 2002-02)

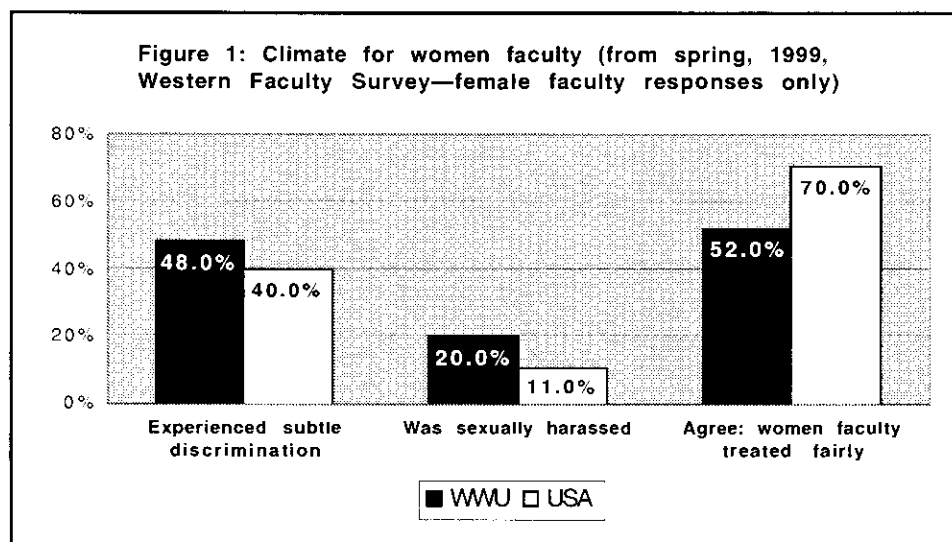
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August, 2002

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1999, the Faculty Senate approved Western's participation in a national survey of faculty conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI). Western's preliminary analysis of the data revealed that Western's full-time female faculty reported experiencing sexual harassment at a higher percentage than did full-time female faculty at peer institutions—with each cohort made up of approximately 62% tenured faculty and 38% non-tenured faculty. It was also noted that Western's female faculty were more likely to report feeling subtle discrimination than female faculty at peer institutions and less likely to agree that women faculty are treated fairly. (See Figure 1 below.) Limited by the survey data at hand, the only other finding researchers could note was that sexual harassment was more likely to be reported by tenured female faculty than by non-tenured female faculty (34% of senior female faculty versus 8% of junior female faculty).



While the data provided by the survey was obviously noteworthy, so too was the scarcity of data. Indeed, key problems with the national survey data included that:

- no time frame was given; therefore it was unclear if the problems were long past or recent; and
- no definitions were given. In particular, were respondents interpreting sexual harassment as gender harassment (the former defined for this study as sexually intimidating or hostile behavior and the latter as poor treatment due to one's gender)?

At the request of the Provost, a committee of faculty and expert researchers was formed in Winter 2001 to advise and plan a follow-up to the finding. This survey is the result of that committee's efforts.

## RESEARCH METHOD

Ultimately, the committee decided to conduct a survey of senior women faculty, and their reasons for opting for this method are delineated further below. But first we think it important to present a rationale for the use of surveys in climate studies generally. Indeed, surveys are recommended and known to be the most effective means of estimating the status of climate issues on campuses (Dobbins, Cardy, & Truxillo, 1986). Unlike focus groups or informal polls, surveys provide systematically gathered feedback from a representative selection of the population. When carefully executed, surveys can provide reasonable estimates of the frequency of the opinions, experiences and characteristics of respondents. However, the method has some weaknesses that cannot be overcome by careful research design. In particular, surveys dealing with issues of discrimination are often criticized for measuring only the *perception* of discrimination with no direct evidence of unequal treatment. Indeed, certain questions often arise in response to surveys like this one. For example:

- How do the respondents know that they were treated in a particular way because of their sex rather than some other factor?
- How can we know that the other is motivated by a lack of esteem for them because they are female?
- Do women interpret some benign behavior as discriminatory in part because they expect to be devalued, harassed or discriminated against?

Such questions raise challenging and complex issues of the relationship between cognition and social reality. They are based somewhat on the notion that it is individual motivation of the actor that defines discriminatory behavior, not the recipient's perception of the circumstance. These arguments have merit but neglect the fact that actors are embedded in a society and culture that devalues women generally. A preponderance of research shows that even well-meaning men and women inadvertently or unconsciously engage in discriminatory practices, and highly educated academics are not immune. Studies in which groups of evaluators are given identical materials, such as research or teaching portfolios with only one difference—the sex of the person being evaluated—show that materials believed to be from females are consistently given poorer ratings than those believed to be from males.

The issue also begs the question of whether perception alone isn't a legitimate concern. Surveys of work environments and employee relations often place substantial weight on employee perception—for example, that their work is valued, that their superiors are respectful and trustworthy. The responses are treated as realistic findings, not misunderstood perception on the part of the employee. When problems are suggested by the reports of employee perception, employers generally respond with remediation and action.

After exploring and understanding these issues, and after an extensive literature review and meetings with a specialist in measuring campus climate (Spring 2001), a survey was constructed that would estimate experience of subtle gender discrimination and sexual harassment (Appendix B). The surveys were administered in a web-based format to all tenured female faculty (N=94).

The committee was concerned that respondents be highly protected in this research effort as respondents' fears of reprisals from faculty or staff who learned of the survey or who saw respondent answers to survey questions might compromise the project.

Because of the highly sensitive nature of this topic and the possible ramifications of any breaches in security, the committee made the following recommendations:

- 1) Face to face, telephone or focus group interviews were not recommended as they threaten the confidentiality of respondents' answers.
- 2) A self-administered survey would allow respondents to thoughtfully review their answers providing reliable and valid data.
- 3) Administration by an on-campus office may threaten the confidentiality of respondents' answers.
- 4) An online survey administered off-site would protect respondent confidentiality.

OSR contracted with International Survey Systems (ISS) and NetReflector.com to provide the data collection services. ISS is a local firm that specializes in employment-related research and web-based data collection. A set of Frequently Asked Questions was developed by ISS in conjunction with the Office of Survey Research (OSR) and was included in the initial memo from the President and Provost (Appendices A and C). The project was reviewed and approved by Western's Human Subjects Review Board.

Respondents were assured of the voluntary nature of participating, as well as concerns that the surveys neither exaggerate nor under-estimate characteristics of the working environment at Western. Each received two email reminders and one notification that the deadline for responding had been extended. Data collection ceased on Monday, March 25, 2002.

#### SAMPLE DISTRIBUTION

From the 94 invited respondents, three were unable to participate during the study period. Of the remaining 91 respondents, 54 completed surveys, providing a 59% response rate. Respondents closely represent the distribution of the population of tenured faculty members, with slightly higher proportions responding from among those who worked at Western for more than twelve years and associate professors. Table 1 shows the year employment began for all tenured female faculty (N=94) and for the subset who responded to the survey. While 15% of those invited to participate in the survey started work within the last five years, only 7% of respondents started work at Western as recently as 1996. Although 50% of tenured female faculty started work at Western prior to 1990, 57% of respondents came from that cohort.

Table 1: What year did you start working at Western?

Year	Population distribution (n=94)	Respondent distribution (n=54)
1996 or later	15%	7%
1990-1995	35%	35%
1985-1989	20%	24%
Prior to 1985	30%	33%

Associate professors responded at a higher rate than expected with 81% responding compared to 45% of full professors. Given the differences between the population and the sample, the findings in this report may underestimate the experiences of the more senior faculty as well as those who are the most recent hires (1996 or later).

### OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES

Fifty-two female faculty provided responses to four open-ended questions which asked respondents to: 1) describe *any other subtle discrimination* they have experienced, in addition to fourteen different circumstances listed in Question 3, items a through n; 2) describe the nature of any *recent event* of gender discrimination or sexual harassment they may have experienced while at Western; 3) describe the nature of the *most serious event* of gender discrimination or sexual harassment; and 4) write in *any additional ideas or concerns*, or elaborate on any survey questions they had trouble responding to. We examined responses to each of the questions, and also examined the questions to the themes that cut across all four questions. The responses were varied and the issues complex, yet certain themes came up repeatedly across all questions. Findings were therefore structured around these overarching themes. We paid attention to how frequently something was said; however, emphasis was also given to comments that suggested higher intensity, and responses that were specific enough to provide detail and key insights.

## SUBTLE GENDER DISCRIMINATION

### INTRODUCTION

Recent research of institutions of higher education shows that gender discrimination and inequities are not uncommon. The focus of much research in the past decade has been with regard to equity, including equal workloads, pay, opportunity for promotion, mentorship through the tenure process and other areas. Reports from institutions as diverse as MIT, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, UCLA, Northwestern University, and Michigan State University all identify troubling findings.

However, inequity is essentially the outcome of subtle discrimination or "micro-inequities" (Rowe 1977, cited in Sandler and Hall 1986). Micro-inequities "consist of day-to-day behaviors reflecting gender, age and ethnic stereotypes that, in subtle ways isolate, discount and ignore members of underrepresented groups" (Kite & Balogh, 1997). The persistence and prevalence of micro-inequities produce a work setting in which those who are discriminated against must direct more energies toward dealing with the inequities and less toward their professional activities (ibid.).

Researchers at the University of Illinois identified five themes that encompass both inequity and subtle discrimination, each of which impact women faculty careers (Stokes, Riger & Sullivan, 1995):

1. Dual standards and opportunities
2. Sexist attitudes and comments
3. Informal Socializing
4. Balancing work and personal obligations
5. Remediation policies and practices

## FINDINGS

### SUBTLE GENDER DISCRIMINATION: ANY EXPERIENCES AND, IF SO, WHEN

In the survey, 15 items comprised a scale measuring gender discrimination. Each respondent was asked if they'd ever had the experience, and if so, when. The frequencies of responses are described below and ranked in **Figure 2** (on page six). Although not shown in Figure 2, every question ended with the phrase "because of your gender." For full question text refer to Appendix B.

The most commonly reported problem was that of a double standard, with 58% reporting recent and prior belief that a double standard exists at Western. Another 20% believed that there *used* to be a double standard, and 22% don't believe there is a double standard at Western. The least commonly reported problem was that of receiving fewer training and education opportunities, with 80% reporting no experiences of this type, recently or otherwise.

### SUBTLE GENDER DISCRIMINATION: EXTENT OF RECENT EXPERIENCES

One of the key research questions that motivated this study was to examine whether the problems that appeared in the national survey were the result of past or recent experiences. To inform that question, we considered the extent to which respondents reported recent experiences.

As **Figure 3** (on page seven) shows, more than half of responding faculty identified two areas of current concern: 1) being misunderstood or put down; and 2) believing a double standard exists at Western. Forty-eight percent also report receiving less pay for the same work. Between 35% and 40% of respondents reported experiences in which 1) their work was treated with less respect; 2) they were held to a higher standard; or 3) they were held in low esteem by decision makers.

Another way to examine these data is to look at the items which, while not the highest in frequency, may be considered the most severe in terms of the extent to which female faculty are experiencing the problem. For example, being ignored when they tried to assert themselves with decision makers was reported by 31% of all respondents, but 77% of those reported experiencing this at the highest extent possible: "extremely" or "very." Being held in low esteem was reported in these upper categories by 26% of all respondents, and the double standard was reported by 33%.

Of the 54 cases, 31 (57%) reported one or more recent events, with the other 23 cases (43%) reporting prior experiences or no experiences only. Another 11 cases (20%) reported no items as recent experiences. The median number of items reported as recent experiences was 4, with a maximum of 13. Knowing that 80% of the reporting female faculty experienced at least one form of gender discrimination in the past 5 years provides us with an idea about how pervasive gender discrimination may be.

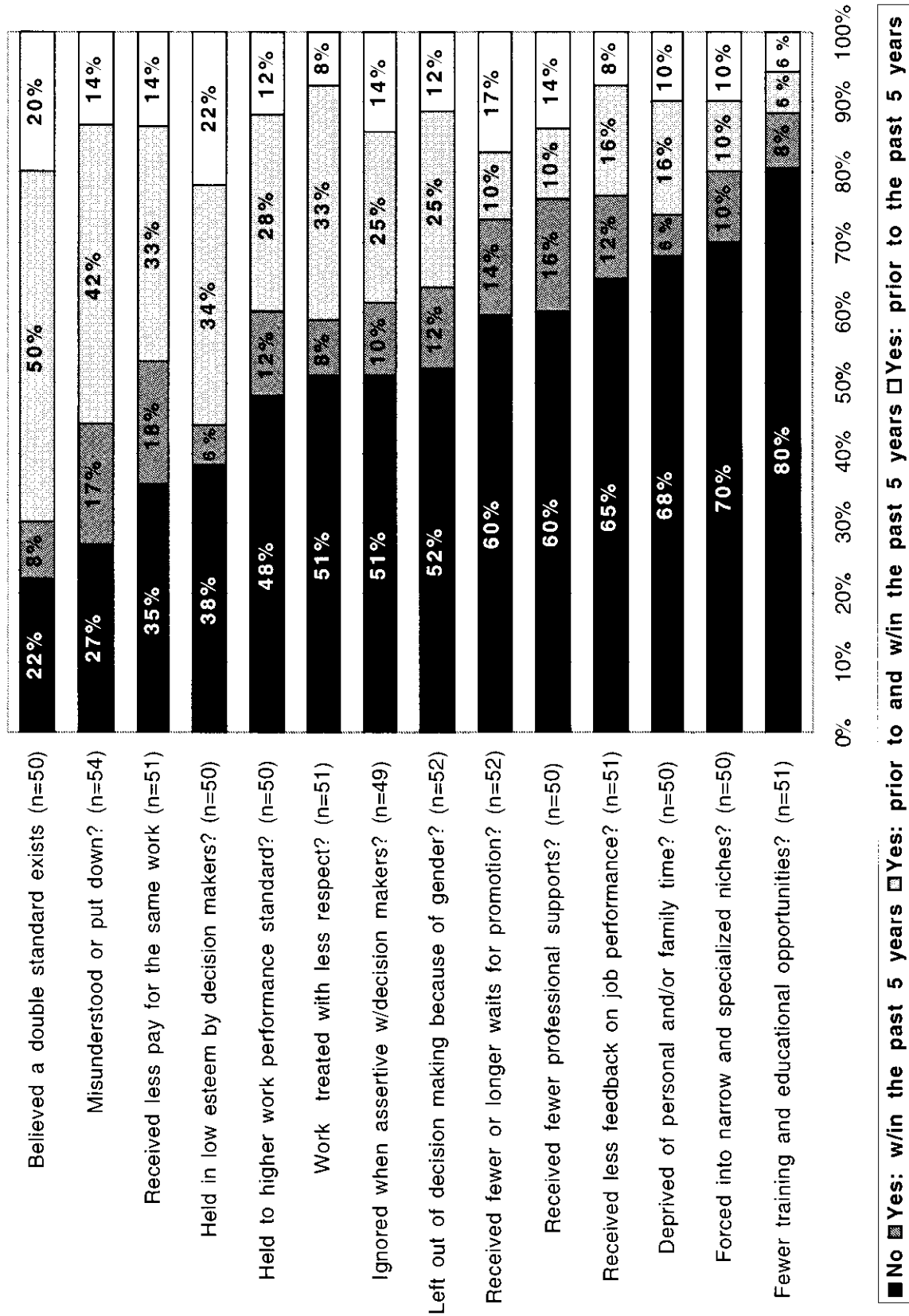
### SUBTLE GENDER DISCRIMINATION: CONDITIONS BETTER, WORSE, OR SAME

Those who had experienced gender discrimination both prior to five years ago and within the past five years were asked if they felt conditions had gotten better, worse, or remained the same in recent years.

Table 2 (on page 8) shows the rank order of the average score, with those most likely to have worsened on the top (mean<2.0), staying the same in the middle (2.0), and better at the bottom (mean>2.0).

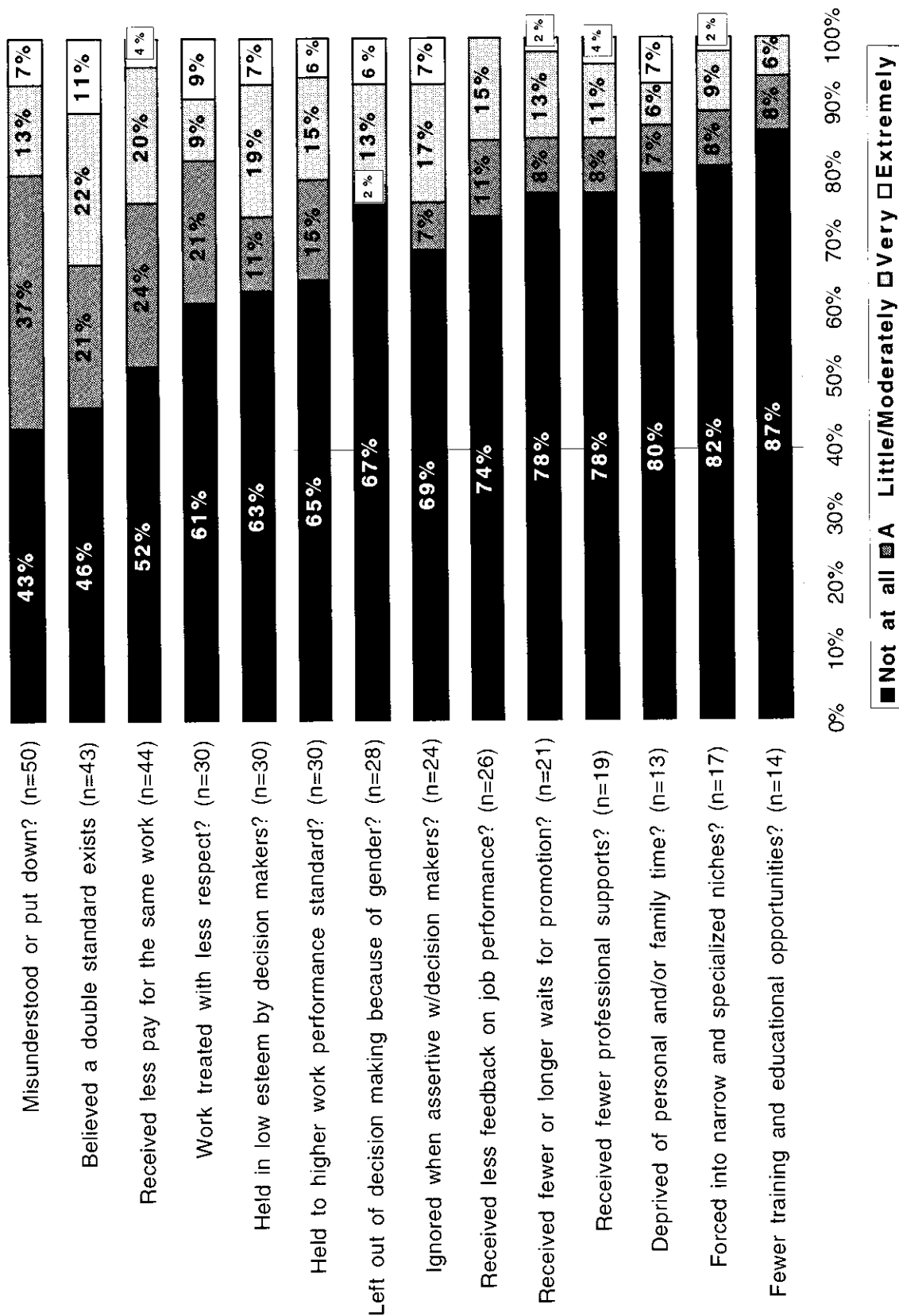
The findings suggest both good and bad news. The good news is that the most commonly experienced problem—"being misunderstood" (mean=2.34)—also shows one of the

Figure 2: Has respondent experienced any of the following and, if so, when?





**Figure 3: Recent experiences sorted by extent**



largest shifts for the better. However, one of the least improved areas—"work being treated with less respect" (mean=1.94)—as been virtually unchanged, with 15 of the 18 respondents to this item saying that their more recent experience has been "the same" as in the past.

It is interesting to note that many of the more objective items (promotions, supports, training) all show improvement. However the less observable forms of discrimination have not improved or have grown worse—particularly those items that represent interpersonal interactions.

Table 2: Better, Worse or Same as Recently

Item	N	Mean (3=better)
Forced into narrow and specialized niches?	11	1.91
Ignored when assertive w/decision makers?	16	1.94
Work treated with less respect?	18	1.94
Received less feedback on job performance?	10	2.00
Left out of decision making because of gender?	16	2.13
Believed a double standard exists	30	2.13
Held to higher work performance standard?	18	2.17
Held in low esteem by decision makers?	24	2.25
Deprived of personal and/or family time?	11	2.27
Received less pay for the same work	25	2.28
Fewer training and educational opportunities?	7	2.29
Received fewer professional supports?	14	2.29
Misunderstood or put down?	29	2.34
Received fewer or longer waits for promotion?	14	2.36

## SUBTLE GENDER DISCRIMINATION: DISCUSSION

A key question in this research project was to determine whether discrimination is currently a part of Western's work climate for senior female faculty and if so, whether it has improved over time or grown worse. These findings show some improvement in recent years over years prior, though they also suggest that most senior female faculty have experienced some gender discrimination in the past five years. Furthermore, between 6% and 33% have had experiences to which they gave strong extent ratings (very or extremely).

Prompted by four open-ended questions, respondents described the nature of their experiences, ranging from subtle discrimination to serious gender discrimination. The

majority of respondents describe their personal experiences primarily in terms of recent events. As several interlocking issues are involved, we begin with the most salient in respondent's minds—inequities and double standards.

#### INEQUITIES AND DOUBLE STANDARDS

Gender discrimination was discussed most frequently in terms of various inequities (21 of 52 respondents). In addition to the information provided to the close-ended questions, 40% of respondents volunteered that they have identified inequities of varying types, including:

- heavier work loads and service expectations compared to male colleagues,
- less pay,
- less access to sabbaticals,
- less travel funds,
- fewer graduate assistants, and other resources, and
- less support when it comes to solving major problems.

Several respondents also reported that they have had to work harder for tenure and promotion, and that a double standard exists. Some said they have experienced serious difficulties when applying for tenure and promotion, including lack of support from their chairs. According to one respondent, "women are expected to be outstanding for promotion, while men do not have to meet the same standard." For example, she had to use extra effort and rebuke two men who voted against her promotion despite the objective evidence. They said she needed more time to demonstrate whether she was worthy of promotion. Another individual says she was asked to go up for promotion at a later date than a male colleague, even though her credentials were stronger. Another individual was passed over for increases in steps when men who had comparable files gained them. Other respondents reported that persons in authority tried to hold back or prevent their tenure and advancement by giving unfavorable merit reviews.

Some respondents said that their pay is lower, despite, as one respondent noted, "...a salary equity study done years ago that identified quite a few women who were underpaid compared to males in similar fields, rank, and experience." For example, one respondent says that a male faculty member in her department came in at a higher salary, has received the general pay increases over the years and still makes at least 10% more than she despite less experience and production, with no external grants.

Inequities of respect for their work were also elaborated upon. According to one individual, "there is an unspoken assumption that male creative and scholarly activities are more valid and valued." Disrespect goes beyond the subject matter or type of work done, it also follows the sex of the person performing the work. For example, one woman who did work in a male-dominated area said that she felt she was given less credit as an instructor than her male colleagues were, despite better preparation and experience in those areas. A lack of respect is reflected in other ways that suggest lower esteem or status is awarded to women: some reported that they have been called employees or by their first name while male colleagues are referred to as doctors, professors, faculty, colleagues or scholars.

Respondents described direct experiences as well as the indirect fallout of gender discrimination on campus—descriptive of the "climate" they perceive as women workers at Western. One respon-

dent describes a situation that happened a few years ago, which she believes has an indirect impact on her as well as other women faculty. She says that very competent female colleagues in different departments were denied tenure at the final stage of the process; however, when a protest was raised, key high-level administrators sent substitutes rather than attending meetings and discussions of concerns about the process. To this respondent's knowledge, no male colleagues were denied tenure that year. This respondent says junior colleagues are concerned over whether they'll be treated fairly when they're ready for tenure and/or promotion. She also says, "The climate that resulted because of that incident has been detrimental to developing trust and support and I think the administration must be aware of and accept responsibility for that perception."

Another respondent reiterates, "We have had more than a 'chilly climate' for women on this campus. And, our glass ceiling is certainly both real *and* visible to all. This is a *huge* and *real* problem!"

#### REDUCED ACCESS TO LEADERSHIP ROLES AND DECISION-MAKING

Directly related to the issues of status and inequities are specific comments from nine respondents about women having greatly reduced access to leadership roles and decision-making. Four additional respondents say there is an "old boys" network that is hard for women to become part of. According to one individual, those who are not part of this network are less likely to get respect and support benefits. She said, "There is a very male administration that seems to require the ability to engage in male bonding activities (sports, drinking) in order to be a full member in the community". She described sitting at a table in which her own tenure and promotion or salary was under discussion, yet feeling "oddly like an ornament" as her male superiors discussed sporting activities.

A theme in these responses was captured by one respondent who said that in her experience, "...only male voices are truly countenanced", while women faculty are silenced or ignored, their opinions dismissed during meetings. According to another individual, "...it is extremely hard for women to be heard at meetings. We tend to be shouted down and not recognized, while male colleagues just talk at will." Another individual says that decisions were made that ignored her reports, even though they were prepared as directed, stating that in her experience, "...my professional opinion meant nothing." According to another individual, as long as she is a "...good girl (agrees with the dominant white men)," she is accorded respect. When she differs from them, "I might as well be mute and invisible."

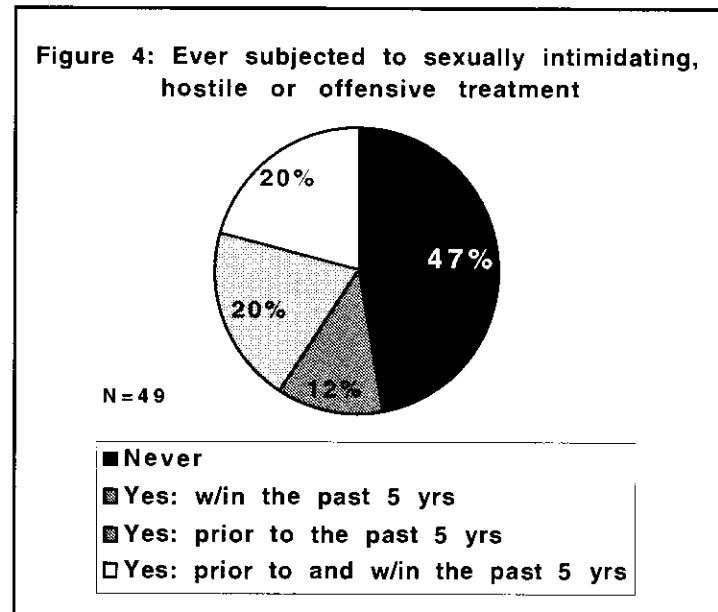
## SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND HOSTILITY

### FINDINGS

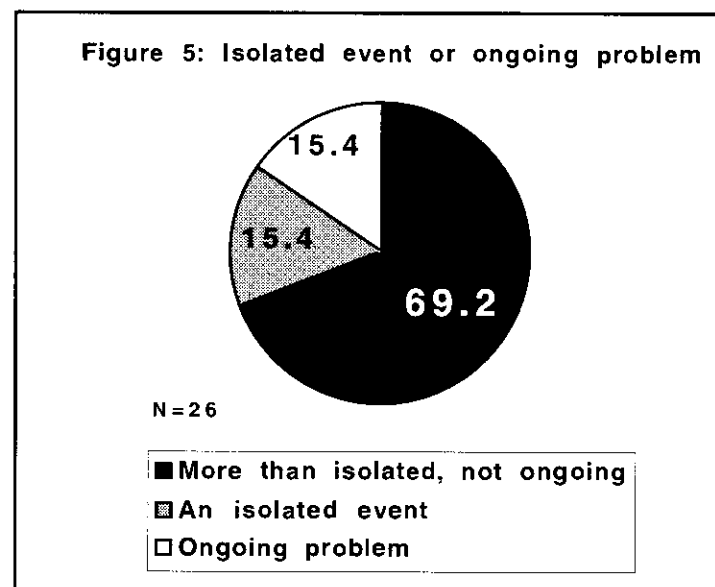
The survey asked respondents questions regarding sexual harassment and hostility in the workplace. Specifically, they were asked:

- if they have ever been subjected to sexually intimidating, hostile or offensive treatment from others at Western and if so, how recently;
- whether their experience was an isolated event, a series of multiple events, or an ongoing problem; and
- if they experienced more than one event, whether the treatment was from one person or different people, and the position type (administrators, faculty etc.) of the person who harassed them.

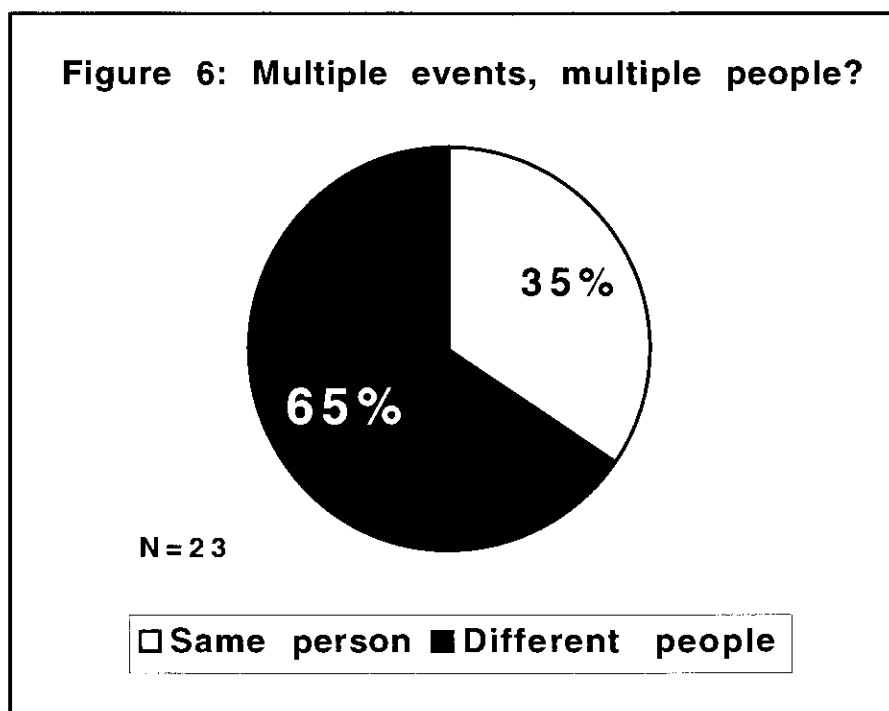
Figure 4 below shows that 47% of respondents reported never having been subjected to sexually intimidating, hostile or offensive treatment at Western. About 53% of Western tenured female reported having had an experience, with almost 30% experiencing an event in the past five years. Full professors were no more or less likely than associates to report problems. However, 77% of respondents who began working at Western prior to 1985 reported experiences of hostility or sexual harassment.



Of those who had experienced hostility or sexual harassment (N=26), 15% described the experience as an isolated event. Another 15% described their experience as an ongoing problem, and the balance (69%) described it as more than an isolated event, but not an ongoing problem. (See Figure 5 below.)



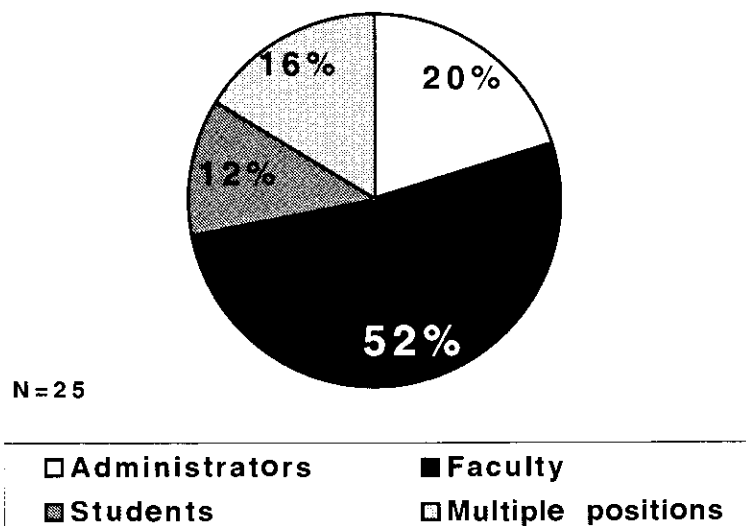
Since nearly half of respondents reported no problems with hostility or sexual harassment, these findings suggest that about 7% of all tenured female faculty may have experienced an isolated incident, and 33% have experienced more than one incident, but not something they would describe as an ongoing problem. About 1 in 13 reported experiencing hostility and/or sexual harassment to such an extent that they would consider it an ongoing problem. (See Figure 6 below.)



For 15% of respondents, if they experienced multiple events, the source was one person. However nearly two-thirds of those experiencing multiple events reported that different people were involved. These reports suggest that the problems female faculty are experiencing are not necessarily due to a few problematic people affecting many women, but rather that there are several sources of sexual harassment and hostility in most of the cases. A few individuals cannot easily disrupt workplace climate in an organization as large as Western. However, the more sources of problems there are, the more the workplace overall can come to be characterized by those problems.

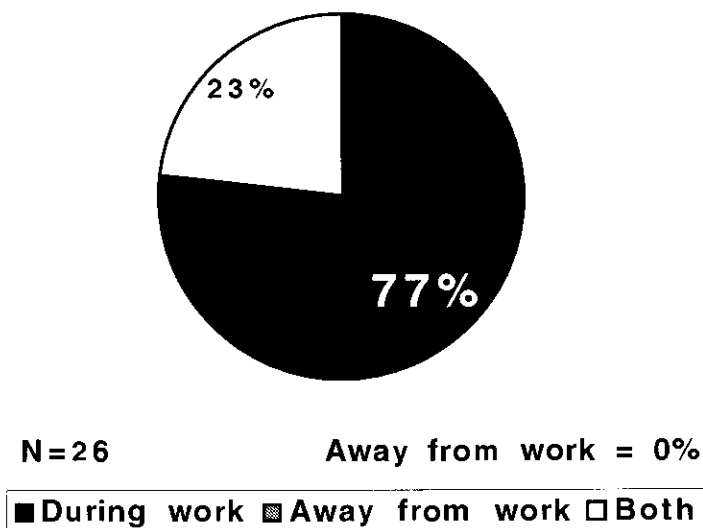
Reports of positions held by those who were the source of the problems showed that other faculty were the key cause. Thirteen of the 25 respondents reported faculty as the source (52%). Administrators were the source of the problems for five more respondents (20%) and students were cited in three cases (12%). Another four respondents (16%) mentioned unknown (anonymous) sources or more than one position—either faculty or administrators. (See Figure 7 on next page.) Rank did not figure strongly in the reports of who the sources were except that associates were little more likely to report problems from students than were full professors, and problems due to faculty and administrators were more likely to be viewed as ongoing while students and others were not. (Note: the term administrators was not defined explicitly in the survey. However, some respondents elaborated on their answers to note that administrators included Department Chairs as well as administrative professionals, deans, and faculty who held joint roles.)

**Figure 7: Types of position of people who were the source**



Respondents were asked whether events tended to occur during work, away from work or both. No events occurred exclusively away from work. About a quarter (23%) of respondents said they had experiences both at work and away from work, while about three-quarters (77%) said they events occurred exclusively during work. (See Figure 8 below.)

**Figure 8: Where did the event(s) occur**



## SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND HOSTILITY: DISCUSSION

From the open-ended responses, eleven respondents said they have experienced various forms of intimidating behaviors and hostile threats, and five more individuals reported sexual harassment, even rape.

Female faculty said they have personally experienced:

- being yelled and screamed at;
- receiving anonymous notes with threats and offensive language; and
- being touched, grabbed, shoved and assaulted

One individual described an event in which her department chair threw things and shouted when she disagreed about a decision, and another describes being physically pushed into her office.

Several respondents mentioned a lasting effect resulting from these hostilities—a silencing of their voices, as well as a lingering lack of trust. According to one individual: "...when the person who is doing the harassment is in a high place it is devastating." Another individual said that, "...relentless, hostile attacks continue, and its effect is to discourage, intimidate and silence women." One individual declined to give details about her experiences, indicating she was "...not comfortable for fear of on-going retaliation." Another said, "I don't trust him and I don't trust that there won't be another knife in my back." Finally, another talked about how "power" was strongly applied by a particular individual, exposing areas of vulnerability and leading her to feel frustrated and inadequate. She no longer experiences the power domination and threats yet, "...the memories are intense and remain."

## ACCESS TO HELP

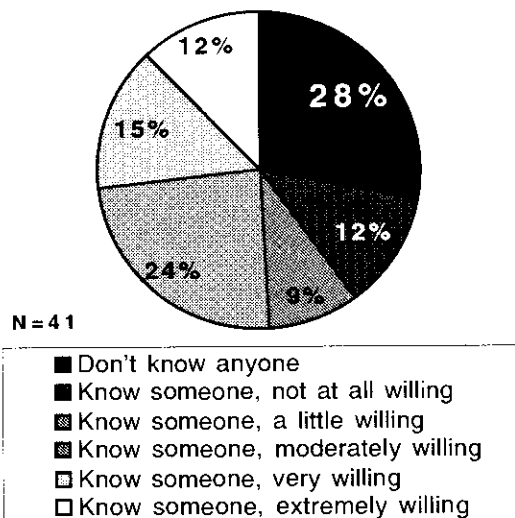
### FINDINGS

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they knew anyone on campus who they could go to in order to resolve problems of sexual harassment and subtle discrimination. A few (11%) did not answer the question, and another 13% weren't sure if they knew anybody or not. Of those respondents who did answer that they either did or did not know someone to go to for help, most, 72%, did know someone; however, only 27% appeared truly willing to seek help. Many, 45%, were, at best, even moderately willing to go for help, with 12% indicating they were "not at all" willing to seek help from that person to resolve a problem. On the other hand, over a quarter (28%) said they did *not* know anyone they could go to for help. Those who have had experiences were no more likely to know of someone they could go to for help than those who haven't; however, the more recently arrived and lower ranked faculty were more likely to say "don't know." (See Figure 9 on next page.)

Associate-rank faculty, more recent hires, and those with no recent experience of sexual harassment or gender discrimination were more willing to seek help. A third of respondents (33%) reported having sought help from someone on campus. Of those only three cases reported having the problem resolved partially or fully. The vast majority of cases did not see any resolution to the problem.

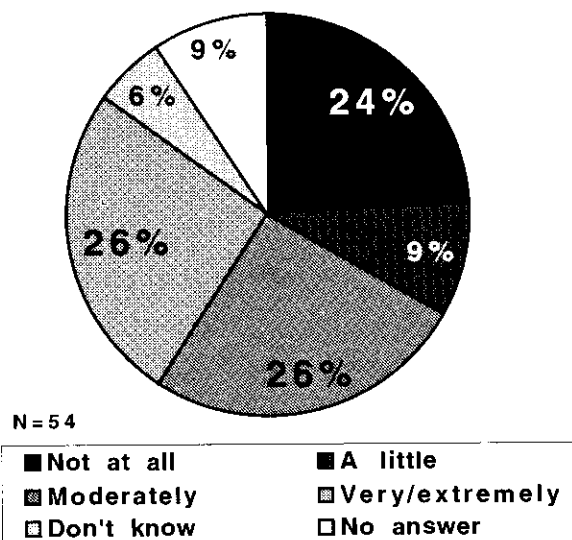


**Figure 9: Know anyone on campus to go to for help; how willing to go**



Respondents were asked how confident they were that the university's administration was willing and able to solve any problems. (See Figure 10 below.) A quarter of respondents (26%) felt moderately confident in the administration's willingness and ability to resolve significant problems, while 33% felt little or no confidence. Those who have never experienced sexual harassment expressed the highest levels of confidence. Those who described their experiences as isolated events were also more likely to express greater confidence in the administration. Several respondents discuss this issue in their responses to the open-ended questions.

**Figure 10: Confidence that administration is willing and able to solve problems**



## ACCESS TO HELP: DISCUSSION

Several respondents mention a lack of trust in the administration's willingness and ability to solve the problems. According to one individual: "It has been my experience that Western administrators over the years have given words but not much action to resolve problems. In the case of salary inequities, we are told there are not enough monies to redress the problem. There are some people in place to provide support, however, there is the concern of reprisals until one achieves the full professor rank."

Another respondent discussed a climate assessment done previously that revealed gender issues, saying that the men dismissed it as a "perception problem". The administration never followed up. She wondered if it will happen again, or whether faculty women will get copies of the results of this survey, so that the administration won't bury the report.

Other respondents said they have asked for help from a variety of sources—including colleagues in their own department, Human Resources, the Women's Commission (now defunct), and the Equal Opportunity Center. However, in none of these cases was assistance was provided. Consequently, one individual believes "...the administration pays lip service to this issue, as well as to racial issues, but lacks insight and commitment." Another respondent believes that the culture here is one of suppression and denial. "Nothing is wrong," she says, "because nothing can be wrong."

Indeed, one individual says she does not know where to go for help with these issues—again mentioning the underlying fear of recrimination: "Please educate us on this aspect. Also educate us on what is unacceptable behavior, and the steps we need to take to document this unacceptable behavior without fear of recrimination."

Importantly, several respondents pointed out that gender discrimination intersects with other forms of discrimination. "By just focusing on gender," says one respondent, "you simplify the complexities of discrimination. It's sometimes hard to separate class and gender."

Class discrimination, subject and discipline discrimination, racial discrimination, homophobia, discrimination for non-traditional family arrangements—these are some of the several forms of discrimination respondents reported. "It's difficult to distinguish between harassment based on gender," says one individual, "and general harassment that just happens to be directed at a female."

Respondents also noted that there are interlocking issues across communities of women and this should be kept in mind when looking to resolutions. For example, one respondent writes, "Why were untenured women omitted? They're often the most beleaguered." Another individual believes that women staff should also have been included in this climate survey, as "...staff are more subject to gender discrimination of various sorts and less likely to be able to defend themselves against it."

## CONCLUSION

The impetus for this survey came from a national study of faculty, which showed that Western's tenured female faculty reported experiencing more subtle discrimination and sexual harassment than expected given national averages. Junior female faculty from West-

ern reported levels commensurate with national averages and substantially lower than senior female faculty. The national survey did not make it clear whether respondents were reporting on current problems or prior experiences, nor did it define discrimination and harassment for the respondents. The results of the current survey suggest that there are significant current issues of gender discrimination and sexual harassment that affect female faculty at WWU, though reports suggest that working conditions may be somewhat better now than in the past. The bulk of the change in working conditions is more likely due to turnover in faculty than any institutional changes implemented to improve the work environment for women.

Respondents' answers to the survey mirror patterns found in higher education at other institutions, including devaluation of professional contributions, isolation or marginalization, less access to networks and experiences of hostility and aggression (Kite & Balough, 1997). Riger and colleagues reported that the expected implications of poor working climate is poor retention of female faculty at the senior level which may, in some cases, perpetuate their minority status in departments. Highly imbalanced sex ratios tend to engender more hostility, which in turn perpetuates the likelihood that a hostile and inequitable work environment will persist (Riger, Stokes, Raja & Sullivan, 1997).

Respondents were pessimistic about the university's willingness to respond to problems of harassment and discrimination on campus. In addition, many did not know of anyone on campus they could go to for help, and of those who did, not many were willing to make use of the resource. These two issues suggest that visible and effective steps will be required to alter those perceptions.

Universities have a mixed record of responding to complaints of sexual harassment and inequities on campus, but have been more consistently responsive to research findings. The following outlines recommendations based on findings from this survey and typical scenarios that have been implemented at some campuses.

◆ WIDE DISSEMINATION OF RESULTS.

One of the most effective first steps taken at other universities has been to distribute the results of research on climate widely to stimulate discussion and inform strategic planning. By making findings available to as many sources as possible, the entire campus can become engaged in discussing and solving the problems.

◆ ESTABLISH A HIGH-LEVEL TASK FORCE OR COMMITTEE

Many universities continued to study their climate problems, identify barriers to the advancement of women and develop recommendations to remedy the situations. One Task Force met for two years, backed by funding from the President that was used for programs and to bring in outside speakers, and had an explicit commitment from the President to respond to their recommendations. Ultimately, their findings and follow-through transferred to an existing women's association. Ideally, the committee is formed with a broad scope of responsibilities and substantial authority to act in order for it to be effective.

◆ PROVIDE A MEANS FOR RESPONDING TO PROBLEMS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

One of the strongest findings of this survey was the lack of resources available to female faculty experiencing sexual harassment and hostility at work. There is no procedure

listed in the faculty handbook dealing with sexual harassment outside the general grievance procedures, which are not up to the task of handling the difficult and sensitive problem of sexual harassment and hostility. Recommendations from other universities suggest arrangements with an independent organization external to the university to protect the integrity of the process.

◆ EXPAND THE DISCUSSION TO INCLUDE STAFF

Other universities (i.e. Northwestern, University of Virginia) found that problems of subtle discrimination and sexual harassment were not confined to faculty but also affect staff. One respondent to this survey noted that she's seen female staff experience problems like those addressed in the survey, and the concern has also been raised by members of the Staff Employees Council over the past several years. The Office of Institutional Assessment and Testing is developing a similar research project for staff to be executed during the 2002-2003 academic year.

◆ ESTABLISH COMMITTEES AT THE COLLEGE LEVEL UNDER EACH DEAN

Explicit and publicly-made commitments on the part of department chairs to the support of women's research and work in their units is one method for sending a strong message to women that they will be supported and a direct mechanism for dealing with issues that are unique to particular colleges on campus.

◆ COMMIT TO EVALUATING CHANGE OVER TIME.

In order to assess the effectiveness of any attempts to improve the work environment for women on a campus, repeated measures are required. Given the level of the challenge, as much as a 10-year commitment to assessing change may be required. Participating in the national study again and encouraging faculty to respond could be one barometer of the effectiveness of the programs, though locally based evaluation is also important.

G. Dobbins, R. Cardy, D. Truxillo (1986). *Effect of ratee sex and purpose of appraisal on the accuracy of performance evaluations*. Basic & Applied Social Psychology. Vol 7(3), pp. 225-241.

J. Stokes, S. Riger & M. Sullivan (1995). *Measuring perceptions of the working environment for women in corporate settings*. Psychology of Women Quarterly 19:533-549.

B.R. Sandler & R. M. Hall, (1986). *The campus climate revisited: Chilly for women faculty, administrators and graduate students*. Washington DC Association of American colleges Project on the status and Education of Women.

M.E. Kite and D.W. Balogh, (1997) *Warming Trends: Improving the Chilly Campus Climate*. pp. 264-278 in N. V. Benokraitis, Ed., *Subtle Sexism: Current Practice and Prospects for Change*. Sage Publications Thousand Oaks.

S. Riger, J. Stokes, S. Raja & M. Sullivan (1997). *Focus on Female Faculty: Measuring Perceptions of the Work Environment for Female Faculty*. The Review of Higher Education 21: 63-78.

## APPENDIX A: PRE-NOTIFICATION LETTER

February 26, 2001

To: Tenured Female Faculty  
From: Karen Morse, President  
Andrew Bodman, Provost

Re: Campus Climate for faculty

About two years ago, the Faculty Senate approved Western's participation in a national survey of faculty conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI). Western's preliminary analysis of the data revealed a finding of concern. We have asked a committee of faculty and expert researchers to advise and plan a follow-up to the finding.

The finding was that a considerable number of tenured female faculty members at Western reported experiencing sexual harassment, subtle discrimination and/or unfair treatment relative to male faculty. The survey provided no additional data on these experiences.

The committee has developed a follow up study to clarify and elaborate upon the findings. We are writing all tenured female faculty members at Western, requesting that you help provide information that will allow the Provost and President to initiate productive discussions with the faculty and to recommend the next steps to take.

To this end, we are inviting you to provide a confidential descriptive account of your own experiences at Western through a highly protected, off-campus web-based questionnaire. You will receive a notice about how to participate in your email on March 4<sup>th</sup>. We have contracted with International Survey Systems (ISS) and NetReflector.com to provide the data collection services. ISS specializes in employment-related research and web-based data collection. Refer to the attached sheet of Frequently Asked Questions to find out more about how to do the survey and the confidentiality protocols. Dr. Pamela Jull, Director of The Office of Survey Research, will conduct the analysis and develop the reports based on the findings. OSR adheres to the highest ethical standards regarding confidentiality and protection of human subjects.

**Participation in this survey is voluntary—there is no penalty for nonparticipation. Although your full participation is appreciated, you can decline to answer any specific questions. Your responses will be entirely confidential. We have asked for only two background questions—rank and the period during which your employment at WWU began—so that no individual could accidentally be identified by some unique characteristic, such as departmental affiliation. This is not part of any disciplinary action; the goal is to learn more about the experiences of female faculty at Western. It is a first step in determining what steps can be taken to improve the climate for faculty.**

We appreciate your honest responses to the brief set of questions the survey will pose. We hope to neither exaggerate nor to under-estimate characteristics of the working environment at Western. It is vital that you respond, and just as important that you respond if you have *not* experienced sexual harassment, gender discrimination or unfair treatment at Western so that we can accurately capture the quality of our campus' climate. The information we gather will have greater weight if the great majority of invited faculty members respond.

Thank you in advance for the time spent responding to the survey. You will receive a notice in a day or two with instructions on finding the website and gaining access to the survey. Responding provides an important service to Western and to your colleagues.

Use of the web-based survey is not mandatory. You may log on and print a copy of the survey, complete it by hand and mail it directly to Tara Wolfe at the address listed at the bottom of the survey.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call.

- For questions regarding the Institution's role in this research project and how the information will be used, please call Provost Bodman (650-3547).
- For questions regarding confidentiality, details of the survey, technical support for taking the survey, or if you need to make special arrangements to complete the survey (for example, you do not use email), please contact Tara Wolfe (715-3745).
- For questions about the research design or questions about the way the data will be analyzed and reported, or the committee's decision to recommend the survey, please call Joseph Trimble, Director of the Office of Institutional Assessment and Testing (650-7781), or Pamela Jull, Director of the Office of Survey Research (650-3618).

## APPENDIX B:

### SURVEY WITH FREQUENCIES



Thank you for participating in this survey. Please help us to understand the climate at WWU for female faculty by sharing your thoughts and experiences. International Survey Systems values your opinions and takes great care in protecting the confidentiality of the information you share with us. If you close your web browser at any time you will have to start the survey over again. If you click on the "finish" button, your survey responses will be completed and you will not be able to access the survey again. Please call Tara Wolfe at 715-3745 for additional assistance if needed.

If you have comments or concerns that cannot be expressed in response to a direct survey item, there is a final space at the end of the survey in which you can elaborate on any other information or qualify your remarks that you like.

**1. In what year did you start working at WWU?**

	Frequency	Percent
1996 or later	4	7.4
1990-1995	19	35.2
1985-1989	13	24.1
Prior to 1985	18	33.3
Total	54	100.0

**2. What is your rank?**

	Frequency	Percent
Associate Professor	29	53.7
Full Professor	25	46.3
Total	54	100.0

**3. The following questions ask about the kinds of circumstances that might constitute subtle discrimination. Please tell us whether you've had such an experience, and if so, to what extent.**

**a) Have you been misunderstood or put down because of your gender?**

	Frequency	Percent
No	14	26.9
Yes- within the past 5 years	9	17.3
Yes – prior to the past 5 years	7	13.5
Yes – prior to and within the past 5 years*	22	42.3
Total	52	100.0

\* Have your experiences in the past 5 years been better, about the same, or worse as your experiences prior to the past five years?

Better	13	44.8
About the Same	13	44.8
Worse	3	10.3
Total	29	100.0

**To what extent have you been misunderstood or put down because of your gender?**

	Frequency	Percent
Not at all	2	5.0
A little	8	20.0
Moderately	17	42.5
Very	9	22.5
Extremely	4	10.0
Total	40	100.0

**b) Have you received less pay for the same work as male colleagues?**

	Frequency	Percent
No	18	35.3
Yes—within the past 5 years	9	17.6
Yes—prior to the past 5 years	7	13.7
Yes—prior to and within the past 5 years	17	33.3
Total	51	100.0

**c) Have you received fewer promotions or longer waits for promotion compared to your male colleagues?**

	Frequency	Percent
No	31	59.6
Yes—within the past 5 years	7	13.5
Yes—prior to the past 5 years	9	17.3
Yes—prior to and within the past 5 years	5	9.6
Total	52	100.0

**d) Have you received less feedback on your job performance than have your male colleagues?**

	Frequency	Percent
No	33	64.7
Yes—within the past 5 years	6	11.8
Yes—prior to the past 5 years	4	7.8
Yes—prior to and within the past 5 years	8	15.7
Total	51	100.0

**e) Have you been left out of decision making because of your gender?**

	Frequency	Percent
No	27	51.9
Yes—within the past 5 years	6	11.5
Yes—prior to the past 5 years	6	11.5
Yes—prior to and within the past 5 years	13	25.0
Total	52	100.0

**f) Have you been held in low esteem by decision makers because of your gender?**

	Frequency	Percent
No	19	38.0
Yes—within the past 5 years	3	6.0
Yes—prior to the past 5 years	11	22.0
Yes—prior to and within the past 5 years	17	34.0
Total	50	100.0

**g) When you have asserted yourself with decision makers, have you been ignored because of your gender?**

	Frequency	Percent
No	25	51.0
Yes—within the past 5 years	5	10.2
Yes—prior to the past 5 years	7	14.3
Yes—prior to and within the past 5 years	12	24.5
Total	49	100.0

**h) Have you had fewer training and educational opportunities than your male colleagues?**

	Frequency	Percent
No	41	80.4
Yes—within the past 5 years	4	7.8
Yes—prior to the past 5 years	3	5.9
Yes—prior to and within the past 5 years	3	5.9
Total	51	100.0

**i) Have you been forced into narrow and specialized niches because of your gender?**

	Frequency	Percent
No	35	70.0
Yes—within the past 5 years	5	10.0
Yes—prior to the past 5 years	5	10.0
Yes—prior to and within the past 5 years	5	10.0
Total	50	100.0

**j) Have you been held to a higher standard of work performance because of your gender?**

	Frequency	Percent
No	24	48.0
Yes—within the past 5 years	6	12.0
Yes—prior to the past 5 years	6	12.0
Yes—prior to and within the past 5 years	14	28.0
Total	50	100.0

**k) Have you been deprived of personal and/or family time because of your gender?**

	Frequency	Percent
No	34	68.0
Yes—within the past 5 years	3	6.0
Yes—prior to the past 5 years	5	10.0
Yes—prior to and within the past 5 years	8	16.0
Total	50	100.0

**l) Have you believed a double standard exists for males and females at Western?**

	Frequency	Percent
No	11	22.0
Yes—within the past 5 years	4	8.0
Yes—prior to the past 5 years	10	20.0
Yes—prior to and within the past 5 years	25	50.0
Total	50	100.0

**m) Have you received fewer professional supports (e.g. travel, funding opportunities, lab space, student assistants) than your male colleagues?**

	Frequency	Percent
No	30	60.0
Yes—within the past 5 years	8	16.0
Yes—prior to the past 5 years	7	14.0
Yes—prior to and within the past 5 years	5	10.0
Total	50	100.0

- n) **Has your work been treated with less respect than that of your male colleagues because of your gender?**

	Frequency	Percent
No	26	51.0
Yes—within the past 5 years	4	7.8
Yes—prior to the past 5 years	4	7.8
Yes—prior to and within the past 5 years	17	33.3
Total	51	100.0

- o) **Is there any other subtle discrimination that you have experienced?**

	Frequency	Percent
No	14	30.4
Yes—within the past 5 years	32	69.6
Total	46	100.0

4. **Have you ever been subjected to sexually intimidating, hostile or offensive treatment from others at WWU?**

	Frequency	Percent
Never → <i>please skip to question 10.</i>	23	46.9
Yes—within the past 5 years	6	12.2
Yes—prior to the past 5 years	10	20.4
Yes—prior to and within the past 5 years	10	20.4
Total	49	100.0

5. **If yes, would you describe your experience as...**

	Frequency	Percent
An isolated event	4	15.4
More than one isolated event, but not an ongoing problem	18	69.2
An ongoing problem	4	15.4
Total	26	100.0

6. **If yes, what was the year of the event/most recent event (if multiple events have occurred)?**

7. **If you have experienced multiple events, was this treatment by**

	Frequency	Percent
The same person	8	34.8
Different people	15	65.2
Total	23	100.0

8. **Please identify the type of position(s) occupied by the person or people who have been the source of any sexual harassment you have experienced (mark any that apply):**

	Frequency	Percent
Administration	5	20.0
Faculty	13	52.0
Staff	0	0
Students	3	12.0
Other	4	16.0
Total	25	100.0

**9. Did the event(s) occur...**

	Frequency	Percent
During work	20	76.9
Outside of work	0	0
Both	6	23.1
Total	26	100.0

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10. **(Write-in responses)** Please describe for us the nature of **any recent event** of gender discrimination or sexual harassment you may have experienced during your employment at WWU. Give as much detail as you feel comfortable with (explaining the context, behavior, reasons for the behavior if you know, pressure or power used, your feelings, your response, and any further response). Please omit any names, or provide a pseudonym if it is helpful in describing the event.

11. **(Write-in responses)** Please describe for us the nature of **the most serious event** of gender discrimination or sexual harassment you may have experienced during your employment at WWU. Give as much detail as you feel comfortable with (explaining the context, behavior, reasons for the behavior if you know, pressure or power used, your feelings, your response, and any further response). Please omit any names, or provide a pseudonym if it is helpful in describing the event.

12. **Do you know anyone on campus who you can go to in order to resolve problems of sexual harassment and subtle discrimination?**

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	26	63.4
No	15	36.6
Total	41	100.0

13. **(If yes) How willing would you be to seek help from that person/those people in order to resolve a problem?**

	Frequency	Percent
Extremely	4	12.5
Very	5	15.6
Moderately	8	25.0
A little	4	12.5
Not at all	11	34.4
Total	32	100.0

14. **Have you ever sought help from anyone on campus in order to resolve a problem of sexual harassment or subtle discrimination?**

	Frequency	Percent
Yes, once	13	28.3
Yes, more than once	5	10.9
No	28	60.9
Total	46	100.0

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**15. (If yes) Was the problem resolved?**

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	2	11.1
Partially or some of the time (for more than one attempt)	1	5.6
No	15	83.3
Total	18	100.0

**16. How confident are you that WWU's current administration is willing and able to resolve significant problems relating to sexual harassment or gender discrimination?**

	Frequency	Percent
Extremely	2	4.3
Very	12	26.1
Moderately	14	30.4
A little	5	10.9
Not at all	13	28.3
Total	46	100.0

**17. Please use this space to write in any ideas, concerns, and recommendations or to elaborate on any survey questions you had trouble responding to.**

## APPENDIX C: FAQ SHEET

## Confidential Online Employee Survey

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### 1. Are my responses confidential?

Yes. We want you to be confident that you can tell us what you think and that your answers are private. The survey has been created by a WWU task force and is being implemented through a highly protected off-campus web-based questionnaire hosted by International Survey Systems and NetReflector.com. The on-line survey comes from NetReflector's InstantSurvey server. Because it is web-based, it is more secure than email.

At the end of the survey, you transmit your answers as a single, one-time transmission. Your answers are not saved on your hard disk. After you close your browser, there is nothing left on your computer that will index or recall your answers. *NOTE: If you do not close your browser, your answers will remain in your browser window and can be accessed by clicking the "back" arrow.* International Survey Systems will NOT, under any circumstances, reveal the identity of any survey participant linked with their responses.

#### 2. How do I take the on-line survey?

You will receive an email that contains the survey Web address. Click on the survey hotlink, or copy and paste the Web address into your browser when you are on-line. You can use any computer to take the survey, however you must use the link you are sent via email, as this Web address will be unique to you. Do not share this Web address with anyone else as it will expire after you submit your responses. This is done to be certain everyone completes the survey only one time.

Your answers stay on your computer until the end of the survey when you click "Finish" and send them to NetReflector's InstantSurvey server. After you close your browser, no copy of your answers remains on your computer or in WWU's system.

**NOTE:** If you are taking the web survey and have to stop to do something else, you can "minimize" your browser to run another program. *If you lose contact with the InstantSurvey server (e.g. by closing your browser), your answers will be lost and you will have to start over. If you press the "reload" button on your browser, it will download a new copy of the survey and you will have to start over.*

#### 3. I tried to take the on-line survey but it crashed. What do I do?

If you lose contact with the NetReflector survey your answers will be lost and you will need to start over. Reboot and try it again, or use a different computer. Start over by clicking on the URL hotlink you received in your email invitation or copying and pasting that URL address into your browser.



If you are having trouble accessing the survey, or for other technical questions, please contact [support@netreflector.com](mailto:support@netreflector.com).

For other related questions, contact Tara Wolfe at International Survey Systems email [twolfe@surveysystems.com](mailto:twolfe@surveysystems.com) or phone (360) 715-3745.

**4. I was taking the survey, but closed my browser to do something else. Can I call up my old answers and complete the rest of the survey?**

No. Once you start taking the survey you must stay in contact with NetReflector's InstantSurvey server for the entire time. You can "minimize" your browser to run another program. As soon as you close your browser (e.g. Microsoft's Explorer or Netscape's Navigator) your answers will be lost. This seems inconvenient—but it is designed to protect your confidentiality.

If you wish to take a break from the survey and come back later, you can follow the directions at the bottom of the survey page you are working on. Otherwise, your answers are sitting in your browser window and are not sent until you click the FINISH button at the end of the survey. At the end of the survey, you transmit your answers as a single, one-time transmission.

**5. Does everyone get to see the comments I write?**

No. We value your opinions and take great care in protecting the confidentiality of the information you share with us. We ask that you *not* include information that would identify you as an individual. We ask that you be honest with your comments.

**6. What will happen with the data once I complete the survey?**

Once you click the FINISH button at the end of the survey, your data will be stored on NetReflector's server. International Survey Systems will then download and transfer the database to Dr. Pamela Jull, Director of The Office of Survey Research at WWU. Dr. Jull will conduct the analysis and develop the reports based on the findings. OSR adheres to the highest ethical standards regarding confidentiality and protection of human subjects.

**7. What if I want to talk to someone about my experiences?**

Western employees can receive 1-3 pre-paid counseling sessions (that is, it's free) through WWU's Employee Assistance Program, 800 E. Chestnut, Suite 1-A; 715-6565. If further counseling is needed, the EAP can refer employees to a counselor. Also: Center for Equal Opportunity, OM 375 x3306; CASAS: Crime and Sexual Assault Support Services, HS 46 X3700; Counseling Center, OM 540 X3164; Off Campus - Whatcom Crisis Services 1407 Commercial St. Bellingham 715-1563